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Reviewing Stand

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Illinois U Library Do We Still Face a Housing Shortage?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. **THE REVIEWING STAND** present members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University, and Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago.

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Do We Still Face a Housing Shortage?

MR. McBURNEY: Do we still face a housing shortage? How do you answer that question, Mr. Manilow?

MR. MANILOW: We obviously do. We have endeavored, in a short space of years, to overcome an accumulation of some fifteen years of very, very meager construction. We have averaged about 200,000 to 240,000 units per year from 1929 on until the last five years when we really stepped up on production. Just as we are getting to that point, we now find that material controls and mortgage controls, because of the emergency, are going to hold us to a maximum of 800,000 to 850,000 units per year. In my judgment this is much below the total units we need to solve the housing needs.

MR. McBURNEY: How many units have you been producing per year over the last two or three years?

MR. MANILOW: Over the last three years we have averaged almost a million units per year.

Cut Back?

MR. McBURNEY: And that is now being cut down, you think?

MR. MANILOW: That is being cut back now with emphasis on housing for the war effort and for the industrial "must" areas.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you agree with that analysis, Mr. Downs?

MR. DOWNS: I think your question, "Do we still face a housing shortage?" should be amended. We are in a housing shortage in the typical areas of America. We face a housing shortage in those few areas which have had enough building to satisfy their current demands at the price levels at which they are available.

MR. McBURNEY: How do you see this, Klutznick?

MR. KLUTZNICK: I think we will probably continue to have a housing shortage, in the light of the forthcoming additional impact of the defense program, for some time ahead. Beyond that, I don't know of any time in recent history when we haven't been in the midst of a housing shortage, except during the period of depression when people just didn't have enough money to buy or rent houses and doubled up and as a result, created an illusion of housing sufficiency.

'Always Insufficient Housing'

MR. DOWNS: I think that is very true, because never in the history of the country have we had as many housing units as we have had families to consume them. Housing demand, of course, is an economic demand and varies at different levels. Those areas of the country in which there is apparently a sufficiency of housing today are apt to be those areas in which there is no rent control operating at the moment.

MR. KLUTZNICK: But, Downs, as a matter of fact, even in those areas where there is a sufficiency of housing or an alleged sufficiency, there is still a shortage in the lower brackets.

MR. MANILOW: That is correct. On that question, in answering the lower bracket, the long-term mortgage at twenty-five year life and the four and four and a half per cent interest rate make the acquisition of a home and occupancy of a home more possible than the occupancy of anything that you can build today in the way of an apartment for rent.

MR. KLUTZNICK: That may be very true, but if we accept the proposition that you have set forth, that the most that we built even in our three best years — incidentally, a little over a million in the last three years on an annual average — the number of roofs we are producing is not enough to keep pace. The people who are going

to suffer the most are not the people with the most consuming or buying power, but the people with the least.

MR. MANILOW: That is always an argument and yet, you will find that there are hundreds of thousands of units, and I have seen them in Memphis, Tennessee, where I conducted a panel meeting, renting two-bedroom units at \$33 to \$38 a month.

MR. DOWNS: Those are not new units.

MR. MANILOW: New units just built.

Low Income Families

MR. KLUTZNICK: Those are new units in Memphis. There are a great number of them, and I have no doubt that we have made great strides in reaching under that market or into that market. But taking your own statistics, if we are producing a million units a year and our demand is in excess of that and we are going to be cutting back again, I say that the total number of units that we will produce or have in the market will be insufficient to house the families, with a growing population and increasing birth rate. In that situation, inevitably, the family that is going to be pushed out of the market is the family with the least buying power.

MR. MANILOW: That is applicable not only to housing, but to any other commodity.

MR. KLUTZNICK: Correct.

MR. MANILOW: As the market of the higher prices is absorbed and consumed, the producers, the manufacturers go into the ever lower, lower market in order to continue to produce at maximum rates.

MR. McBURNEY: Just following the war we had a really dramatic housing shortage, I take it. I can recall time after time when this Northwestern University Reviewing Stand discussed various aspects of the housing problem, and we thought it would be interesting to raise this question again at this time. Now, do we face a housing problem in that sense today?

MR. DOWNS: I think it is perfectly clear that never since the end of World War II have we solved the problem of a housing shortage. We have made great inroads on it, it is true, but the danger which exists now is that because of restrictions, financing and materials and others, that we will get into another accumulation of a backlog of housing demand which will produce a situation such as that which we faced in 1946.

MR. KLUTZNICK: Downs, isn't this a fact? The 1946 situation was dramatic for sentimental and compulsory reasons; the accelerated demobilization which came upon us in a hurry, the desire to get the boys who were coming back housed, the fact that they were coming back in much greater numbers than earlier plans had indicated, all tended to intensify the drama of the situation. Now to a lesser degree we have isolated situations of that kind today brought about by the defense program, the Paducahs, the Aikens, the San Diegos. We have dramatic housing shortages in isolated areas in this country that are every bit as dramatic in those areas as was the 1946 period.

'Political Issue'

MR. DOWNS: I feel that is true, except that after the war the situation was so acute that it became a national political issue. I think it can be fairly stated that the political emphasis on housing in the last year or two has sort of been on the wane, but I believe that in the next few years, unless we keep an adequate level of construction, we are going to see that same emphasis again.

MR. MANILOW: What you have both brought out is simply the fact that we are having a further dislocation of the limited number of housing units that the industry is going to be confined to. If you take 800,000 units as our maximum and, say, produce 400,000 of them merely to answer the real needs of the military and production, you will reduce to 400,000 units the remainder of housing that will be available for the rest of the country and, therefore, exaggerate further the housing need.

MR. KLUTZNICK: I think Mr. Downs has made a point that ought to be emphasized. Housing is no longer merely a matter of economics in the market. It varies in political intensity and has become pretty much a political issue. The Congress recently grudgingly enacted — and I think that one must say that — almost grudgingly enacted a defense housing bill. It would have liked to have stayed out of the business. If this present trend continues, housing will get on the front page again as a defense measure, at which time we may find political solutions which our economic discussions will not produce at all.

MR. DOWNS: I think the area of political action in the field of housing has been on a steady level of expansion. For example, the FHA is a politically created device. The VA is a politically created device. Much of our present operation in housing depends upon politically created devices, and, as Mr. Klutznick has said, I look for an enlargement of this political interest which has been on the wane, let's say, since 1948.

800,000 Units

MR. McBURNEY: You say some 800,000 housing units will be built next year — do I have that figure right?

MR. MANILOW: The government has set the goal of between 800,000 and 850,000 units for next year.

MR. McBURNEY: What kind of units will they be, Mr. Manilow? Apartments? Single-family dwellings?

MR. MANILOW: Well, the units that are going to be built for the relief of the so-called war effort will be rental units in the main.

MR. KLUTZNICK: That doesn't mean apartments, necessarily.

MR. MANILOW: That does not. They may be single-family units.

MR. KLUTZNICK: Held for rent?

MR. MANILOW: Held for rent, that is, at rates negotiated with those in charge of the defense areas.

MR. McBURNEY: Will this be government stuff?

MR. MANILOW: No, they will be privately built but under war control—

MR. KLUTZNICK: Under Title 9 of the new Defense Housing Act.

MR. MANILOW: Under Title 9 of the new Defense Housing Act. They will be mainly in the lower-priced field. I would say below \$10,000 per unit in the main.

MR. McBURNEY: Are many houses — take the Chicago area here as an example — are many houses being built for rental purposes?

MR. KLUTZNICK: Do you mean houses or apartments?

MR. McBURNEY: I mean houses.

Free Standing Houses

MR. KLUTZNICK: Houses being built for rent are almost a phenomenon of compulsory laws such as Title 9. There is no real reason for anybody building free-standing houses for rent. They are not economical to operate for rent when you have to have supervision and overhead and whatnot in the maintenance of those houses. No, in areas of this kind the modern approach, of course, is row houses, walk-ups and tall buildings.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, even in the apartment area, many of the apartments appear to be cooperative units which you have to buy.

MR. DOWNS: I think that probably our listening audience has quite an interest in rental housing. Because of economic circumstances the percentage of total units represented by multiple-family dwellings available for rent has been decreasing for a number of years. During the last two years, during which time the FHA had what they called Title 608, enabling the construction of a certain level of apartments, there was a substantial amount of apartment building. That thing is now dead, and the risk capital available to build apartments is almost nil. Mr. Klutznick's and Mr. Manilow's organizations have

been among the few organizations in this area and in the entire country, as a matter of fact, that have built any substantial number of three-bedroom units for rent.

MR. KLUTZNICK: I think it would be interesting to note that the number of three-bedroom units that we have built at Park Forest—which was some 702, in a metropolitan area of let's say five million population—constitutes as much as all other builders combined have produced in the last four or five years.

MR. McBURNEY: I can't understand this problem. You say economic circumstances make it impossible or unlikely that further rental units will be built, but isn't the rental unit something that we desperately need?

Middle Income Group

MR. DOWNS: One of the major problems in the economy of rental units is that rental units involve a level of service which people can't afford any more. The average man who lives in a \$15,000 house today can't afford to have a man stoke his furnace. He doesn't need him, as a matter of fact. He can't afford to have a gardener. He can't afford to have a maid. He can't afford to have somebody show up every winter morning and shovel his snow. In apartments that is all included in the rent. When you add that to the high level of construction, the fact is that people really can't afford, even middle-income people can't afford rental housing in the United States today.

MR. McBURNEY: Can they afford to build a house?

MR. KLUTZNICK: The natural answer has been, of course, that with government insurance aids and VA aids and the extended period of amortization and relatively low interest rates that have undergone some minor changes recently, that the average person could better afford to own a house and pay the monthly payments than he could to rent an apartment described as Mr. Downs has described it with the service that is involved.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you suggest that that is true now? That it is better for a man to own a house than to rent one?

MR. KLUTZNICK: I think that is an individual problem that should be answered individually. In the case of the person who is stabilized and knows he is going to be in a community for a reasonable period of time and knows his source of income, by all means, it is better for him to own than rent.

MR. McBURNEY: They have controls on rent, but if you go out and buy a house now in this market—I just did, gentlemen. . . .

MR. KLUTZNICK: Good for you.

MR. McBURNEY: Well, I am not sure. I am out of pocket an awful lot of money. Now, is that a wise move?

MR. KLUTZNICK: May we ask you a question? How big a house is it?

MR. McBURNEY: Four bedrooms.

MR. KLUTZNICK: And all the facilities go with it?

MR. McBURNEY: Yes.

MR. KLUTZNICK: Then how much would it cost you to rent one of Mr. Downs' apartments with four bedrooms?

MR. McBURNEY: That is up to Mr. Downs.

Time to Buy?

MR. DOWNS: I think that brings us into the question whether it is a good idea to buy a house. This opens up a whole area of discussion.

MR. McBURNEY: I don't mean to introduce it as a personal question, gentlemen. I think it is a problem that a good many people face. Obviously, if you don't have these rental units available, the alternative is buying a house of your own.

MR. DOWNS: I think the significant answer for our audience is the fact that you have just bought a house, Mr. Klutznick is just going to build one and I have one in the design stage. We are presumed to be ex-

perts, at least, and we are answering that question by positive action on our own part. The only reason Mr. Manilow hasn't bought a house is because he has one of those rich apartments along Lake Shore Drive, I guess. [Laughter]

'Building Costs Up'

MR. MANILOW: Well, Dr. McBurney, if given the proper vehicles, I believe it is possible to produce a given amount of rental housing, not on as advantageous a basis, or down to as low a monthly base as it would be possible to purchase a home, but certainly much below what, in the absence of long-term financing and low interest rates, would otherwise be possible. We built the three thousand, Mr. Klutznick and I, our company built the three thousand units in Park Forest. If we were to endeavor just about four years later to reproduce them today, our rents, I believe, Mr. Klutznick, would have to be about one-third greater than what they are now.

MR. KLUTZNICK: At least.

MR. MANILOW: That is something, of course, none of us has any control over, the constant lessening of the purchasing power of the dollar; but notwithstanding that, give us fifty-year loans, give us a four per cent interest rate or less, give us a vehicle that doesn't require the landlord to furnish all the facilities to the occupant and we would have the means by which builders could produce rental housing at the lowest possible per-room rent.

MR. KLUTZNICK: That is right. The fact of the matter is, McBurney, we have now for some years been substituting increased periods of amortization, lower interest rates, lower payments and reduced services in an effort to take over the adverse effect or overcome the adverse effect of increasing capital costs. Now you can continue that for some future period of time. At some point, however, I am sure a hundred-year loan might be looked at a little askance. That is the only thing I can say.

MR. MANILOW: Why don't we look at the situation now? I gather that of the forty million homes we have standing today, more than fifty per cent of them were built prior to 1929 and I dare say a great percentage of those, after twenty odd years, have twenty, thirty or forty more years of good life remaining.

Real Estate Values

MR. MCBURNEY: Of course, there are several people around the table here who are old enough to remember what happened to real estate values and the values on homes bought on a high market. They lived to see the day when they were sold for an awful lot less money. Is that in store for us again?

MR. DOWNS: I think that is a very good question to bring up at this time, because so many people are interested in knowing whether, if they buy a house now, they will face a substantial loss. There are many reasons why we don't think that is so. First, we are in a managed economy and an expanding managed economy, and the only way you can go in a managed economy is up. Second, we are in an area of serious manpower shortage. We ought to understand that the housing over-supply which was created in 1930 to 1933 was not a result of over-building. In 1929 we didn't have enough housing for the people of the United States, but the fact is that if you deny several million people their source of income, they are going to withdraw from the housing market. They are going to move in with somebody else and then, apparently, you have an over-supply of housing. If we maintain our present high level of employment and we have expanded it in the face of our fears of a depression after World War II, we are going to have a continued demand for housing which will prevent that sort of thing.

MR. KLUTZNICK: I would like to point out this other thing. I don't think there is any comparison at all between the present situation and that which led up to the last depression, but let's consider the last depression.

What happened to a lot of families who purchased their homes? There was created a home owners loan corporation which enabled a couple of million of them to stem the tide. And let it be said for those who did, it was a remarkable record of confidence in home ownership that they ended up with a product that was worth a lot more at the end of the run than the dollars that they might have kept if they had been able to put them into the box at the time. But aside from that, the average family that has to face that issue has to look at a house, not as an investment. I think it is a mistake for a man, a wife and a couple of youngsters to think in terms of whether they should buy a house as an investment. They either need it or they don't. If they need it, today is as good a time to buy it as any, and with modern loan mortgage financing and with the kind of amortization we have, they will have as good or better chance, in my opinion, to survive any real downward trend, as compared with buying margins and securities and things of that sort.

'Warned Against Buying'

MR. MANILOW: This reminds me of the time when Mr. Klutznick was in charge of the housing activities of our nation. I was building Jeffery Manor then, where more than three thousand families are residing in homes built by my company. People were warned against buying homes in those days, if you will recall, Mr. Klutznick, and there isn't one . . .

MR. KLUTZNICK: I didn't warn them.

MR. MANILOW: No, you were not among those who warned them. You were doing then what you are doing now: stating that if they needed a home, they ought to buy one and buy it when they needed it. However, others didn't feel as you did and warned people not to buy. There are countless hundreds of thousands in this country who believed in those warnings and heeded them, and as a result passed up the only opportunity they will probably ever have in their

lifetime of owning a home. Those same \$6,000 houses are today selling for more than double \$6,000.

MR. DOWNS: I recall speaking in California, which was, as you know, a state that had a large population growth due to the war effort in World War II. A man at a real estate convention there got up and asked a question. He said this: "I built a house in 1939 that cost me \$5,000 and I sold the same house today for \$10,000." He said, "What is going to happen when the war is over and we get an entirely new setup? Won't that house go back?" My feeling then and the answer to the question was that it would sell for \$14,000. As a matter of fact, it has.

If we go ahead with a constantly expanding economy with a dollar that drops off systematically in value, real estate, which represents materials and labor which must be replaced on a going market will always continue to go up in price. Buildings in Chicago, in New England, all over this country today can be sold over the telephone in five minutes for from two to four times what they cost forty to sixty years ago.

Good Construction?

MR. MCBURNEY: I wanted to ask this question, if I may, about these new houses that are going up. How good are they as houses? There are a lot of people who feel that the older house is a better buy, that it is a sturdier building.

MR. MANILOW: I don't believe that anyone could come to that conclusion unless they thought that the thickness of a wall or the weight of material determines the soundness and useability. I believe that the houses today are better planned, possess much finer equipment, new types of material, and new methods of construction. An 850 to 900 square foot house can give the occupant better efficiency and better livability with equal life than a house of yester-year half again as large.

MR. KLUTZNICK: I think we have necessarily given up space in this post-

war period just like we did after the last war. I don't think that is all a loss by any manner of means. I think we have substituted in a measure certain livability and we have been compelled to show ingenuity in planning and design that we, perhaps, didn't show so much of when space was cheap and dollars were a lot easier to use in the production of housing. I would like to point this out, however, that a lot of people who say that houses today are not as sturdy as they were are thinking in terms of a badly built house. Of course, there are badly built houses today just as there are badly built almost anything. Or they are thinking of their efforts to buy for \$8,000 something which, to be produced, properly costs \$10,000 or \$11,000. Of course, there are evidences of shell houses and modifications of shell houses around the country which are badly produced and which are built of green lumber, but a good house, well produced, today is worth the money at the hands of a competent builder.

'Haven for Appliances'

MR. DOWNS: I think there is also a nostalgia for the good old days. People tell you that the old houses are better. They will tell you that any automobile built since 1941 isn't as good. Most of that is wishful thinking. The fact is we are doing a better job technologically and in every way than we did before. I think it must be agreed, however, that we are giving up some standards of space, as Mr. Klutznick has said, in order to pick up the standards of equipment. Our houses today are a haven for appliances. They are a mecca for mechanics. They are altogether a different kind of a thing than we used to build, but they are just as good and maybe better.

MR. MANILOW: I would like to recall areas that you are particularly

familiar with, Downs, houses built in the '20s on twenty-five foot lots with unused attics and with unused basements, except for being accumulators of debris. The houses of today are built on much wider lots. I very seldom find one today built on anything less than forty feet and most are built on lots larger than that. Now, we in Park Forest don't have any house built today on less than a fifty-foot lot, as Mr. Klutznick knows.

MR. KLUTZNICK: Very few at fifty.

MR. MANILOW: Very few at fifty, and most at sixty. So, again, I repeat that with the greater supervision that municipalities are imposing upon construction methods and design and the lending agencies and FHA and the Veterans Administration, you must, as a result, have a much smaller percentage of bad housing than you did have in preceding years.

Land Planning

MR. KLUTZNICK: We must also think of the house, as Mr. Manilow has indicated, as a part of an environment, and land planning is far superior to what it has ever been.

MR. DOWNS: I think we also ought to make the point in this broadcast that in terms of the cost to the consumer never in the history of our country could as large a percentage of our population look forward to home ownership as they can today.

MR. McBURNEY: Are housing costs at all out of line with other prices?

MR. DOWNS: No, they are definitely not. They are below. The increase in the cost of the house is less than the increase in the cost of most other things. . . .

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is up.



Suggested Reading



Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.



International City Manager's Association. *The Municipal Year Book 1951*. The Association, Chicago, 1951.

Of particular interest is D. Gazzolo's chapter on "Housing Developments in 1950" which gives factual data and tables concerning the situation throughout America.

American City 65:80-1, Jan., '51. "Growing Pains of a Village Government." D. O'HARROW.

The village president of Park Forest, Illinois reveals the "problems of developing a new town with private capital."

American Economic Review 41:555-616, My., '51. "Housing Problem: I. The Current Situation." L. GREBLER.

"The housing inventory: analytic concept and quantitative change."

American Economic Review 41:586-98, My., '51. "The Housing Problem: II. Long-Run Effects of Government Housing Programs." L. N. BLOOMBERG.

A paper prepared by a member of the Public Housing Administration on "The Role of the Federal Government in Urban Housing. "

American Economic Review 41:599-611, My., '51. "Policy Problems in Expanding the Private Housing Market." S. J. MAISEL.

Present government programs have aided greatly in helping to meet the housing problem.

Commerical and Financial Chronicle 174:506, Ag. 9, '51. "The Home Financing Business in Partially Mobilized Economy." W. J. L. RAY.

"Despite government participation in the business, private concerns still furnish bulk of home financing."

Journal of Housing 8:7-8, Jan., '51. "31,689 Low Rent Units Under Way."

Low rental public housing units provide homes for low income families but the number of such units is too small.

Journal of Housing 8:221-22, Jl. '51 "Senate Votes 'Yes' on 50,000 Units of Public Housing 1951-52."

A summary of the public housing question as voted on by the Senate.

Journal of Housing 8:297-98, Sept., '51. "Congress Acts on Housing."

The final results on the Independent Offices Appropriation Bill and the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act of 1951.

Monthly Labor Review 72:22-3, Jan., '51. "Summaries of Studies and Reports: Housing and Population in Metropolitan Areas." M. F. CARNEY.

"Residential building activity varied considerably in different metropolitan areas when related to population size and population growth."

Monthly Labor Review 73:1-14, Jl., '51. "New Housing-Trends in 1949-51."

A group of three articles which presents "basic information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' surveys of housing in metropolitan areas."

Newsweek 38:80, Sept. 10, '51. "Housing: the Boom Is Over."

A special report on housing which "deals with this vital industry's present state, chief problems, and prospects for the future."

Survey 87:359-60, Ag., '51. "Can Housing Emerge from Confusion?" L. F. JOHNSON.

The housing program is filled with confusion according to the executive vice-president of the National Housing Conference, Inc.

United States Housing and Home Finance Agency. Office of the Administrator. Division of Housing Research. Feb., '51. "The Housing Situation, 1950."

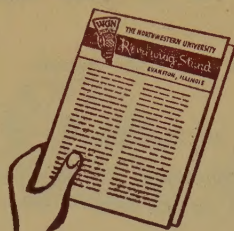
"An analysis of preliminary results of the 1950 housing census." Includes tables and chart.

United States Housing and Home Finance Agency. Office of the Administrator. Division of Housing Research. Jl., '51. "Housing Statistics."

Contains "current information on housing production, construction costs, home finance and public housing . . ."

U.S. News 31:37-9, Ag. 31, '51. "Lift for Building."

An article representing extensive research regarding revised rules for buying a house. Includes a table of down payments and monthly payments for houses of various prices under G.I., F.H.A., and private loans.



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